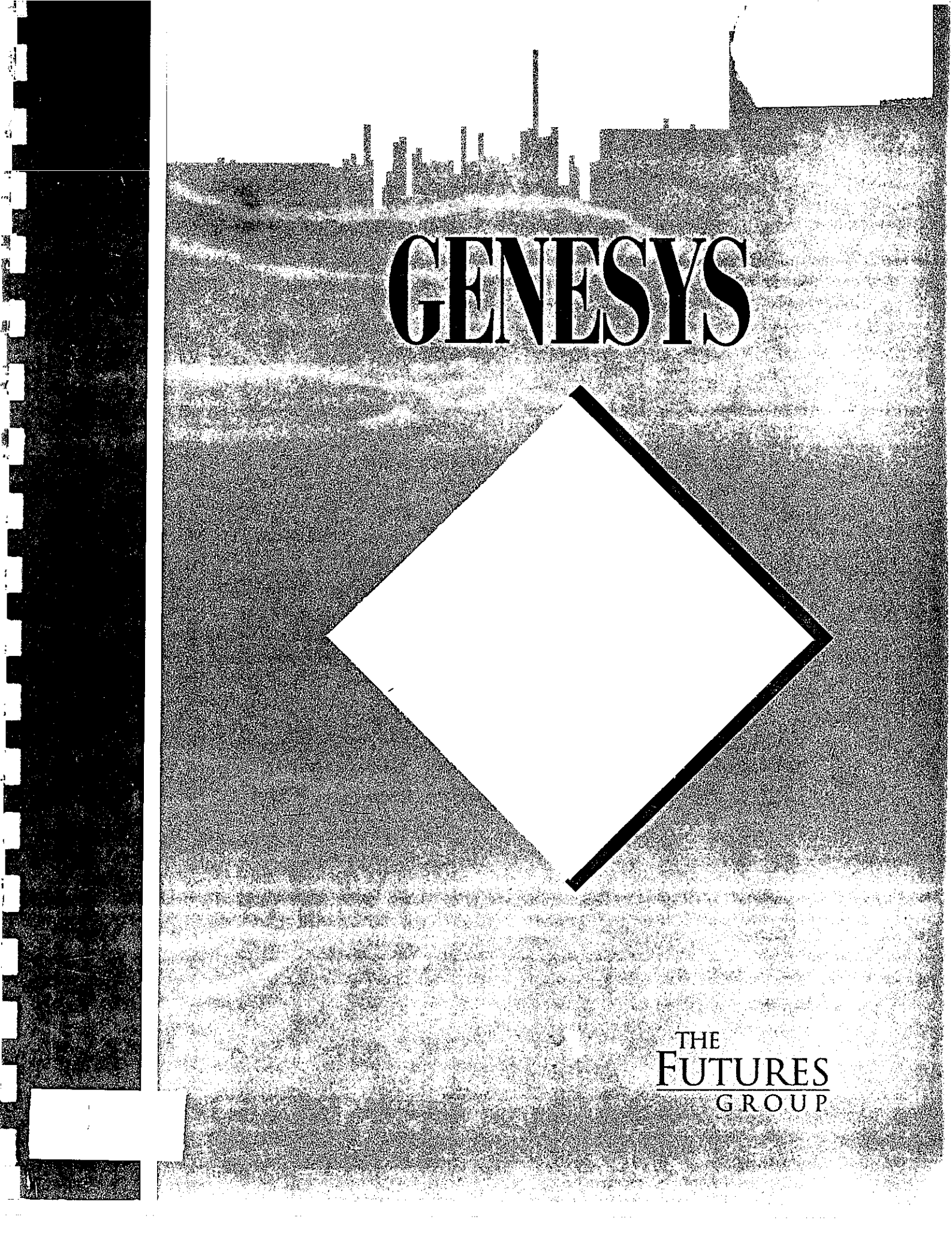
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PROTECTING THE QUALITY OF LIFE: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY OF FAMILY MEMBERS

Pietronella van den Oever

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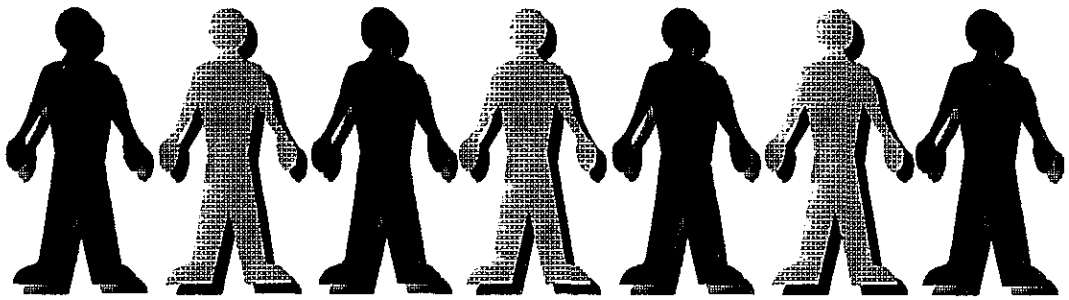

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Introduction[1]

The topic which I have been asked to speak about is one that is very general and broad. I shall have to narrow down the subject a little and briefly address the following key points:

- *What is a family?*

- *What are the most basic relationships between families and households and the concept of sustainable development?*

- *What is meant by "sustainable development?"* I will give an overview and discuss how the most basic processes taking place in families determine global population scenarios and patterns of use of the natural environment. We will also take a brief look at some future scenarios of the world population, and identify some major issues for protecting the quality of life, based on my own presentation and on some of the subjects which have emerged from previous presentations during this seminar.

What is a family?

There are many ambiguities and misunderstandings in the discussion of the family and the household. These two concepts differ, and must not be equated. However, I would like to point out that <u>both families and households must be included</u> in our discussion on families and their relationships to the environment, as resource use is a shared responsibility of members of either families or households.

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[1] See Annex 1

For clarification let me present the official definitions of *"family"* and *"household"* as defined by the U.S. Bureau of the Census for use in basic statistical data collection.

FAMILY

"Two or more persons related by birth, marriage or adoption who reside together."

HOUSEHOLD

"May consist of one person who lives alone or several people who share a dwelling."

"Family" is a concept that can vary greatly; it is a dynamic concept. Take a young family; it begins with no children; children are born, grow up, and leave the home; and the couple is left with an "empty nest" - but it is still the same family. There are just different stages in the life-cycle of the family.

Furthermore, different types of families are more or less prevalent in different societies, with different types of resource use. For instance, the two person family, the "couple family" - either a young couple without children or an older couple with an empty nest situation - is much more prevalent in highly industrialized societies and in societies with a large older population.

The nuclear family, consisting of parents and one or several children, is also much more prevalent in highly industrialized societies. These families have different patterns of resource use, and generally have quite a different relationship with the natural environment than extended families composed of collateral relatives and more than one or two generations. Extended families of some form or another are much more

prevalent in overwhelmingly rural and agrarian societies, where agriculture is still the predominant mode of sustenance and economic production.

Families come in many different forms. For example, there are families with many children and then there are families composed of either only males with children, or only females with children. The latter category - female-headed families with children - is common in Central and South America and growing in numbers in Africa and Asia, and also in the inner cities of the United States.

While families consist of two or more people related in some way, households may consist of only one single individual living alone in an apartment or house. The single-person-household is becoming more and more frequent in highly industrialized societies where people tend to establish themselves away from their family of origin in order to pursue studies or work. In addition, since women in these societies tend to live longer on the average than men, and tend to marry men slightly older than themselves, a large proportion of elderly women become widowed at some point. This category is growing rapidly among single person households.

The number of households consisting of several unrelated individuals is rapidly increasing as well in the highly industrialized societies. For instance, several young people starting out in college or jobs may be renting a house or an apartment together. This is a very good use of shared resources. They may be attached to each other in some way or they may simply be friends. Whatever their relationships, together they are the basic responsible unit for resource use: for their consumption, their production, their trash, etc. Therefore, for our subject of protecting the environment we need to include households of any kind.

When speaking about the basic units in which people live, the first image that comes to mind is the picture of a father, a mother, and a certain number of children. This picture is no longer accurate. The graph on U.S. Household Composition, taken from

a booklet published by the Population Reference Bureau under the title: *"New Realities of the American Family"* (provided in Annex 2) clearly shows that in 1991 the father-mother-children families made up only 26% of all households of the United States! The largest group among all the households, 29%, consists of married couples without children. Most of these are in the older age group and are the highly consuming couples. As it was mentioned yesterday, these couples are precisely the ones that have a different pattern of leisure behavior. They have finished paying the costs involved in starting a family and have reached their period of peak earnings. Among these couples there is a large proportion that now have both the time and the money necessary to travel to exotic places and to purchase goods and materials that they previously could not afford.

Neither one of the remaining categories, which make up 45% of all American households, consist of families in the sense of the nuclear family concept. Nevertheless, all the remaining household categories are basic units of resource use. This must be kept in mind if we talk about the family in general and its relationship to the environment.

What is Sustainable Development?

Briefly, it can be defined as:

> **"Improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems"**

This definition comes from "*Caring for the Earth*", a publication launched in October 1991 as a joint effort of IUCN, UNEP, WWF, with contributions of UNESCO and FAO. I mention this book, because it is an excellent, if idealistic, tool with practical guidance for sustainable living.

The prerequisites of sustainable development are simply, that

- Soils remain productive
- Water remains drinkable
- Fish remain edible
- Air remains breathable

It is important to keep in mind that we can still have all these prerequisites, but not without effort. For instance, there are places in the world, like the Sahel, where it is difficult to find water. Even if water is found, it must be drinkable. Most of child mortality and morbidity, as well as infectious diseases, are a result of polluted water.

In "*Caring for the Earth*" the following nine principles were identified which must be followed in order to arrive at a sustainable society:

(1) Respect and care for the community of life.
(2) Improve the quality of human life.
(3) Conserve the Earth's vitality and diversity.
(4) Minimize the depletion of non-renewable resources.
(5) Keep within the Earth's carrying capacity.
(6) Change personal attitudes and practices.
(7) Enable communities to care for their own environments.
(8) Provide a national framework for integrating development and conservation.
(9) Create a global alliance.

Let me briefly comment on these 9 Principles. The first Principle is closely related to the discussion on values which emerged out of a previous session of this seminar. The second Principle likewise points to a value system, but it has a definite and broad practical angle. Human life on Earth has to be improved because a large proportion of the world population lives in poverty and operates under unsustainable conditions for their livelihood; as well as for the conservation of the natural environment on which they depend. There may be the stereotype that in Western countries human life does not need to be improved, but this is an erroneous assumption. In fact, major improvements have to be made to arrive at a sustainable society in the technologically

advanced countries as well as in the less developed countries. We have invented great technology which in many instances has had harmful impacts on the natural environments in which they are applied. Unfortunately, we have not built up the social structure which would allow us to use our technology selectively and wisely, nor are we making much effort to acquire the sociological knowledge necessary for building up social structures that can cope with technology. As yet, we know too little to establish those social mechanisms and attitudes that would avoid over-exploitation and provide the necessary structures to use technology for the benefit of all mankind.

As to conserving the earth's vitality and diversity, referred to in Principles (3) and (5), I am reminded of our discussion about dilemmas. The major dilemma in this case is that even biologists are not in agreement on what are the key species in the intricate system of the earth's biological diversity. In other words, we are not yet capable of making informed choices, because we do not know what are all the possible options. A major issue is that some of the existing bio-diversity will have to be sacrificed in order for countries to build up their social and economic development potential, while at the same time trying to improve the quality of life of the human population. This is an extremely difficult undertaking as long as there is no coherent idea on what are the choices for altering our natural environment; the lack of existing knowledge regarding what can go and what cannot without causing irreparable damage.

Principle (4), minimizing the depletion of non-renewable resources, also implies that these resources must be substituted at a rate faster than the rate of their depletion. For example, solar energy must ultimately replace other sources of energy which are now being used more widely. However, there is not much effort being put into achieving this as quickly as it seems necessary.

Principle (6) is of course very much related to the theme of our seminar, since most of the discussions are centered around changing personal attitudes and practices.

They are directly related to the collective behavior of members of families and households.

The role of communities, referred to in Principle (7), is of crucial importance for our seminar theme. Most members of families and household are affiliated with a variety of community structures and associations. These are precisely the mechanisms in which practical actions take place. The various interest groups at the community level are generally much closer to "home" than the existing government structures. Therefore, their actions often are more practical, more easily implemented, and generate more motivation on the part of the individual families and households than those activities and projects implemented by governments. However, we do need partnerships; we need a national framework as referred to in Principle (8); and, as proposed in Principle (9), we have to create a global alliance. Very often it is said: *"Think globally, act locally"*. I think that we need both: to think globally and act globally; *and* to think locally and act locally, **in a framework in which global, national, and individual families' goals are compatible and geared towards sustainable development.**

We shall now examine certain global consequences of processes which are decided upon within family units but added together determine the global scenario of humankind. These processes are as follows:

Demographic Processes at Family Level

- **Childbearing**
- **Death**
- **Moving**

These are the most basic demographic processes which determine the size and structure of families. At an aggregate level they determine the size, structure and distribution of total populations and influence the use of resources as well. It is a

common misunderstanding that demography mainly addresses questions of fertility. This is not correct. Fertility is just one aspect of population dynamics among many others which are equally important.

Deterministic expressions like *"the impact of population on development" or "the impact of development on population"* should be avoided, because these variables are often at the same time both cause and consequence. At some moments they are cause, at other moments they are consequence.

Populations are composed of families and households, and demography gives an overall picture of the three processes mentioned above. These processes also influence the use of resources. Populations composed of small families tend to have different consumption patterns than those with predominantly large families. The resource consumption per capita tends to increase, sometimes considerably, as families become smaller. We often find that large families as a unit consume less than the two-person household, or the couple with one or two children. During research in Burkina Faso I found a family with 105 persons and 27 adult women, all related by family ties and all living in the same household. I am sure this particular family consumed much less than my family of four!

Large families, such as the one in Burkina Faso, use their natural environment quite differently from the way families do in urban societies, even in one and the same country. Rural and urban families use their resources in different ways. Even this is subject to change, as people in highly industrialized societies living in the countryside or in villages adopt urban life styles. In addition, people who reside in the countryside and are commuters basically use natural resources in the same way as city people, even though they live in rural areas. It is clear, however, that in predominantly agricultural countries, in which the labor force is composed mainly of agriculturists, the overall use of natural resources is very different due to the fact that the daily survival of the people depends on those resources.

Demographic Momentum[2]

Much attention must be paid to what demographers call the **demographic transition**. At present societies in different regions of the world are in different stages of this vitally important change in the population scenario. The onset of the demographic transition occurs when, in a given society, both mortality and fertility are high. At the early stages of development, societies start to industrialize and to apply some form of medical improvement. Mortality usually declines before fertility does. This must be so, because societies in which fertility has declined before mortality no longer exist. The result is an enormous growth of the population until fertility goes down too. When the annual number of births and deaths in a given population is about equal, and when each woman has on the average two living children, enough to replace their father and mother, a society has reached around zero growth. This is what we now have in many Western countries.

Three graphs of societies in different stages of the demographic transition are provided in the visual presentation "Age Patterns of Population" in Annex 4. The graph shows that Kenya's population base of children and young people is very large. This means that there is a relatively small working population for a very large population of children. The United States is an example of slow growth, with a large number of people in the working ages and a large top of older persons. This means that there is a favorable "dependency ratio"; the working population is large enough to support both the young people and the old. Denmark's population is moving towards the shape of a column, with few children, many old people, and a fair proportion of persons of working age.

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[2] See Annex 3

Within this general population growth process, many micro-processes are taking place in the families, which have an impact on the age-sex structures of the population. It is precisely the present age-sex structure which determines the future size and shape of a population.

In Annex 5, an example is given of the relationship between age-sex structure and demographic momentum in South Korea. In 1960 South Korea had an enormous base of children. By 1980 those children had moved up to the age at which they started child bearing. Although Korea now has an average of less than two children per couple, its population will still continue to grow. The graphs of the Korean population in the years 1960, 1980, and 2000 demonstrate that two generations after fertility has declined the population continues to grow! Thus a country like Korea, which tries to improve its education and quality of life, will have to accommodate many more people. This demographic momentum is often not taken into consideration when we speak of population planning and population policies.

In the Korean example, demographic momentum and the ensuing age-sex structure of the population is projected solely on the grounds of present and future fertility and mortality.

Let us now consider another example of demographic momentum illustrating how unbalanced sex ratios happen as a consequence of fertility over mortality with migration as an additional variable. Annex 6 provides a picture of the gender distribution of the United Arab Emirates. The large number of excess men in the working ages represents the male migrants from other countries. The structure for women is quite different, with a dip in the younger adult ages. This could represent a large number of women going overseas with their husbands for study or work reasons. A similar picture could be drawn for the city of Nairobi for the same reasons. In a rural area of Kenya, however, there would most likely be a heavy surplus of

women. The reason for this distribution is the gender division of labor; people migrate according to the way they are related to their natural resources.

For our topic of ***Families Protecting the Quality of Life***, it is important to consider that, in general, families in rapidly growing countries use fewer resources than families in countries with slow or shrinking population growth. But we have to keep in mind that in those countries with rapid population growth, the urban populations tend to increase more quickly than the rural populations. This urbanization presents new and different implications of resource use.

As a result of the global demographic momentum, if every couple in the world today had no more than an average of two children, by the year 2025 there will be around 8 billion people on earth. Due to the large number of couples entering their primary reproductive ages, this enormous population growth is unavoidable; we must realize this and accommodate for it.

There is one part of population growth, however, which could be avoidable with proper population policies. To prevent the population from increasing past the 8 billion estimated by 2025, couples need to be given incentives to produce no more than two children. If this issue is not vigorously addressed, there will be 10 billion people on earth by the year 2025, rather than the 8 billion expected as a consequence of the world population's demographic momentum.

The demographic history of mankind has clearly known a dizzying acceleration during the last century. By the year 2100 there is expected to be around 11.5 billion of people on earth. While it took the entire history of mankind until the year 1800 to arrive at the first billion, it has taken only 190 years longer to arrive at 5 billion! By the year 1800 the population began to escalate, and a tapering off is not expected until sometime after 2100 (Annex 7). The rate and the circumstances of population growth vary in different regions of the earth, with Africa, Latin America and some

parts of Asia now increasing the most, and Western Europe remaining stationary or even shrinking in several places (Annexes 8 and 9).

There will be many more families and households on the earth, but their sizes will be smaller. Both in developed and developing countries we will have many more older families, which also signifies a different use of resources.

A larger proportion of urban families will also bring a different use of the environment. There will be more families that are less directly dependent on natural resources for their survival. Although the daily sustenance and livelihood of these families will not be **directly** affected by any personal mismanagement, they will be **indirectly** affected. This presents a problem - if our livelihood is only indirectly at stake, it is much more difficult to raise the necessary motivation to be careful and protect our resources. Here we have a formidable task, because motivating people for the protection of their environment and the related quality of life will need new approaches (Annex 10).

As a conclusion, I would like to say that the combination of micro-processes taking place in the family determines the qualitative and quantitative use of resources at a global level. Although the family is the basic unit, and the households, however they are composed, are responsible for resource use, global and national strategies are very often in direct contradiction to what families and households need. Policies must be made compatible with the needs of families, there is no other way.

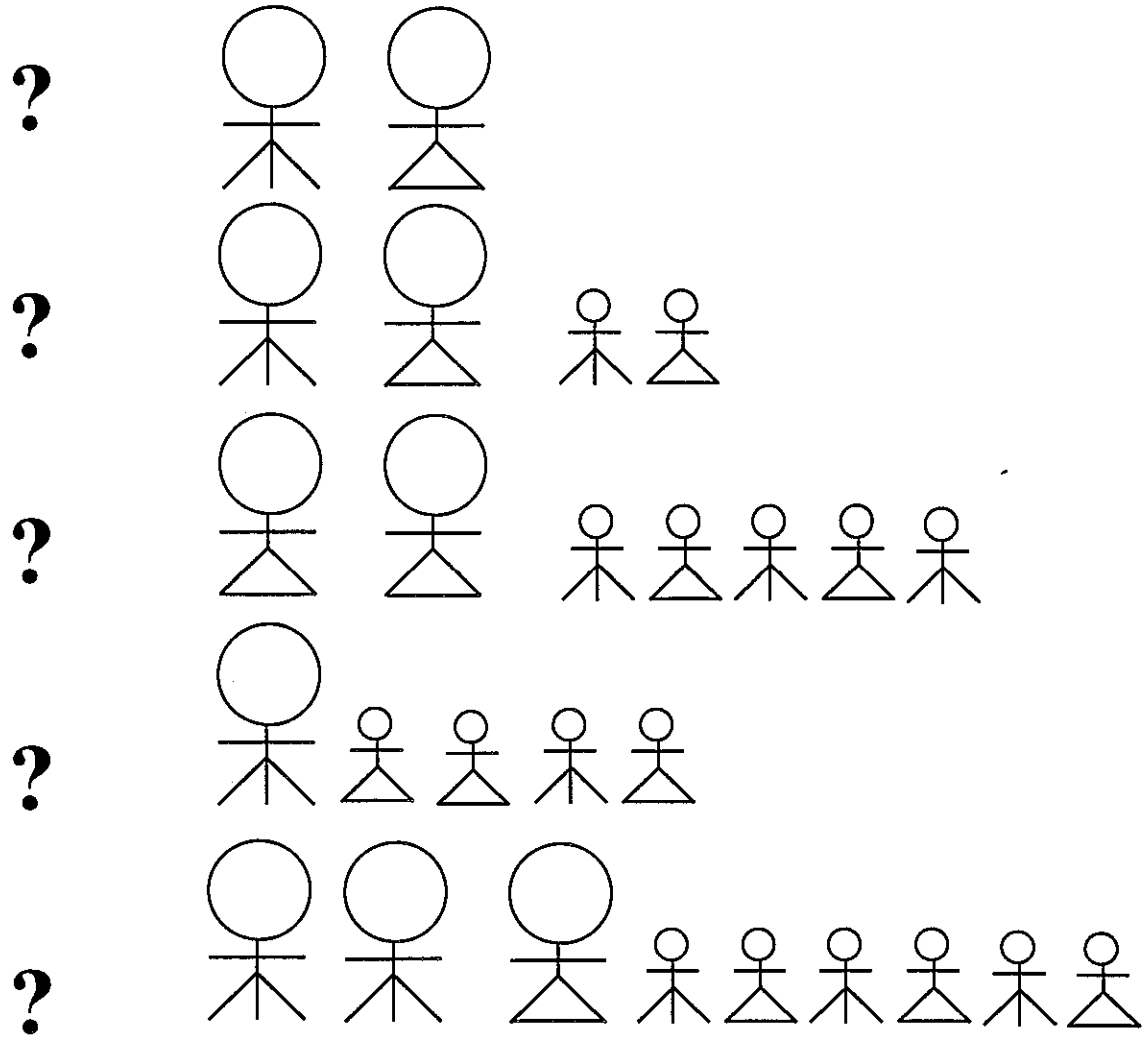
We also need much more knowledge than we currently possess. Having the necessary knowledge will allow people to make informed choices. Individual consumers and household units ultimately will determine what is bought, produced, and wasted. As to the flow of information, we need to remember that parents educate their children; and in return children educate their parents more effectively than adults educate other adults.

The huge gaps between the North and the South, the West and the East are not the real issue of the future. Every country is in a transition; a demographic transition as well as a transition of resource use. We must see countries moving on the scale of a continuum - there is no strict and inflexible dividing line as to patterns of resource use if we remember that we are all interdependent! Global challenges can only be faced successfully if micro-level processes are compatible with macro-level requirements (Annex 11).

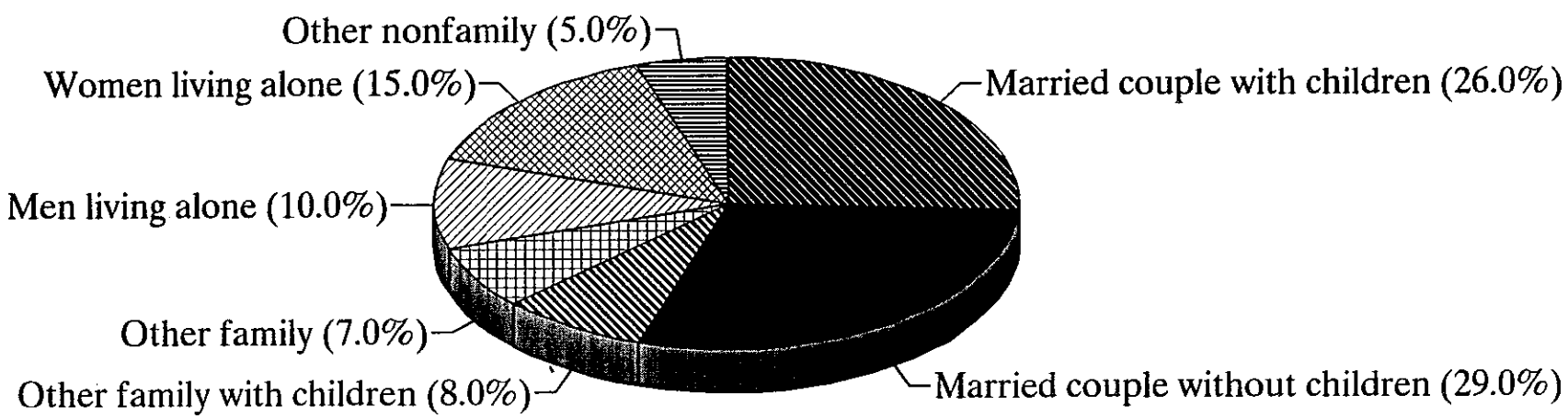
Annex 1

THE FAMILY

What is a Family?



U.S. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION
1991



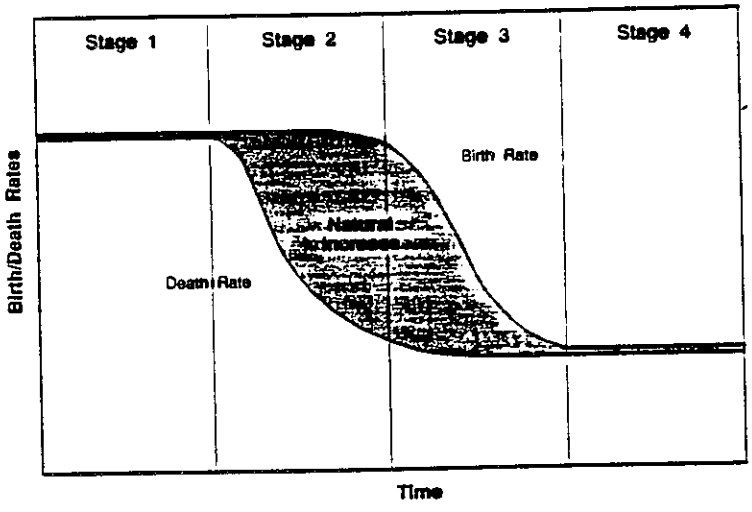
* Source: Population Reference Bureau New Realities of the American Family

Annex 2

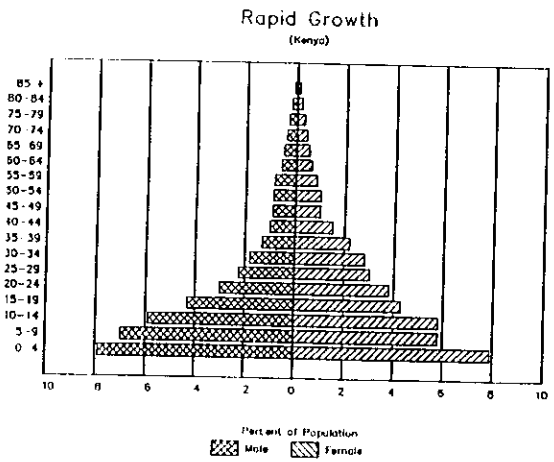
Population age-sex structure differs in different regions of the world. Therefore:

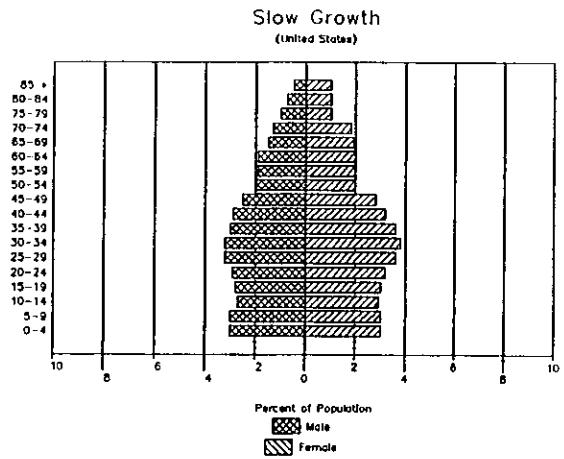
"Demographic momentum" differs for different regions of the world.

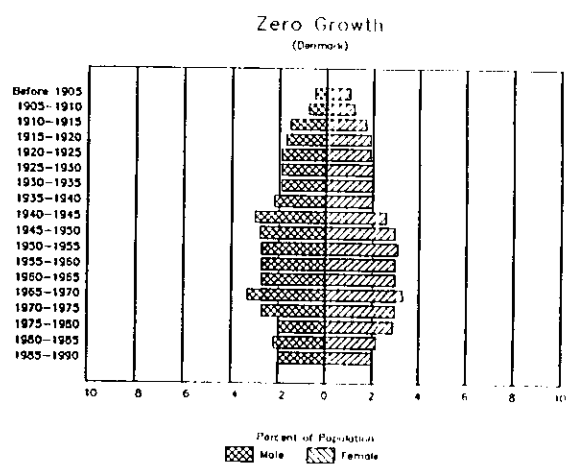
The Stages of Demographic Transition



Age Patterns of Population



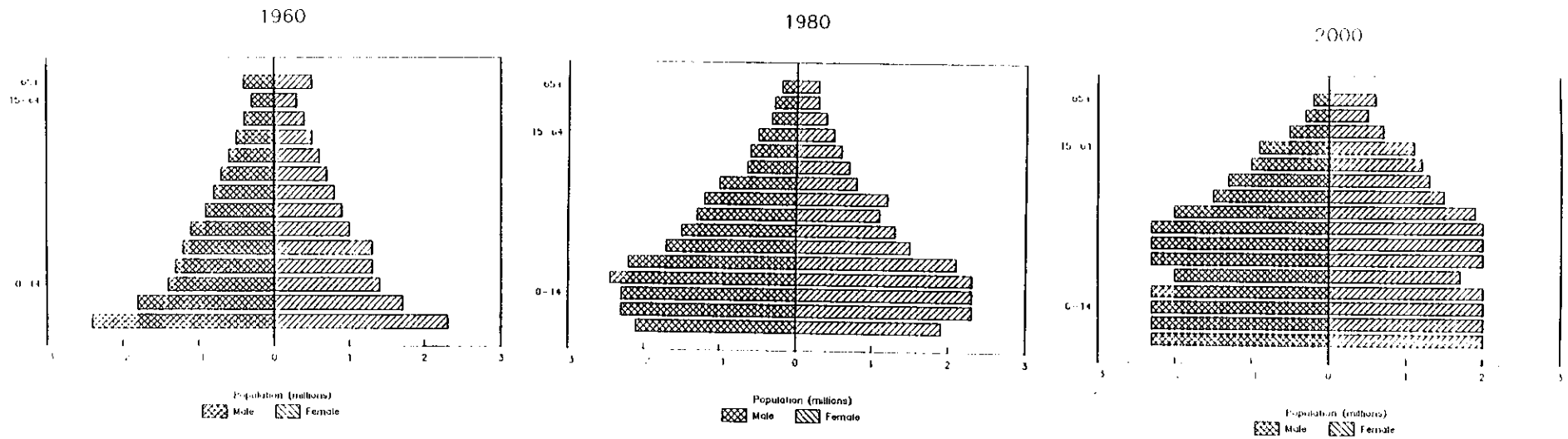




Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census and the United Nations.

Annex 4

South Korea: Stages of Demographic Momentum

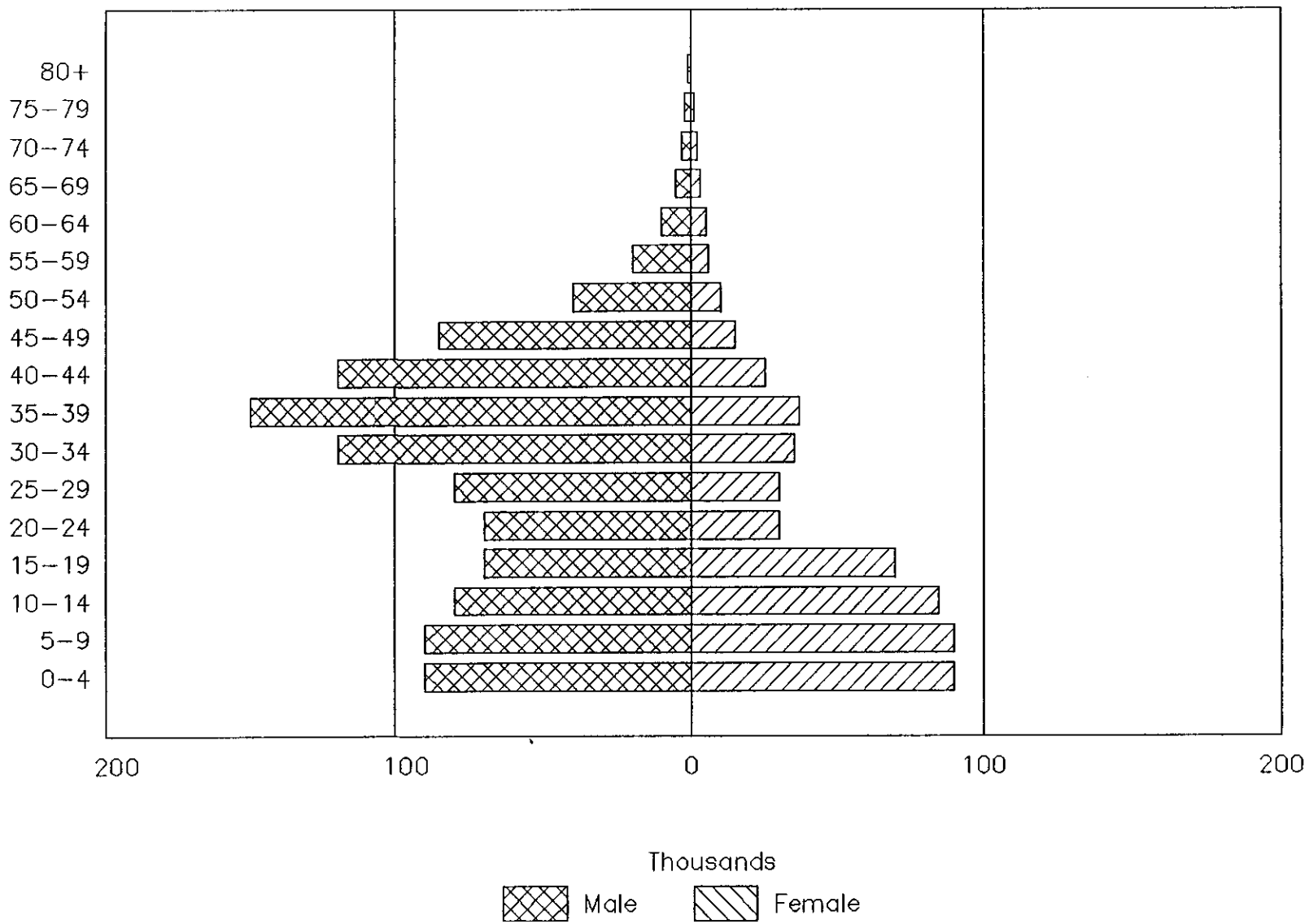


Mason, Andrew, 1986. *Demographic Prospects in the Republic of Korea: Households and Education to the year 2000.* Cited in O.K. Kim, 1990, *The Changing Structure of Korean Families*, First Draft. IUCN - The World Conservation Union.

Annex 5

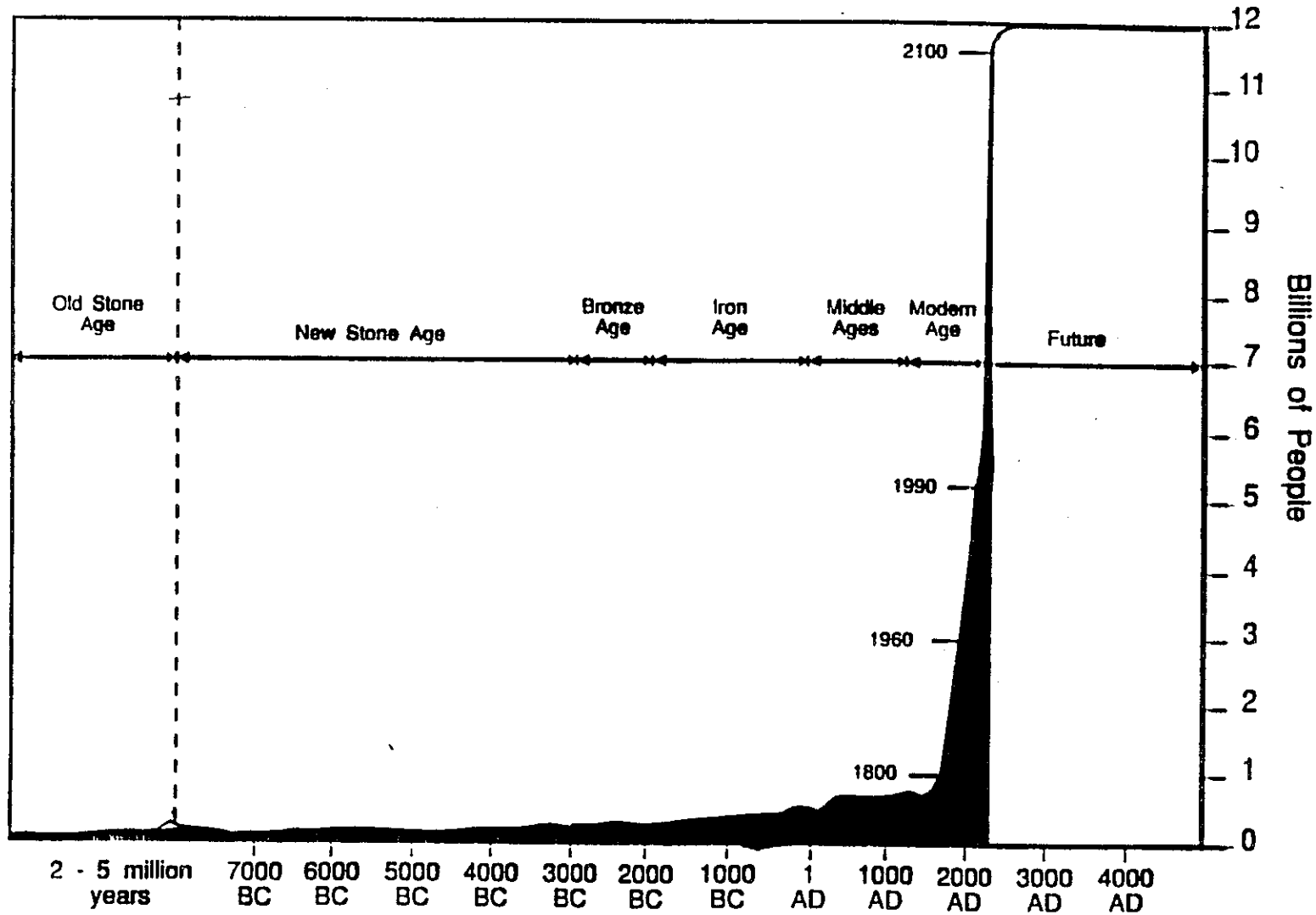
Unbalanced Sex Ratio:

United Arab Emirates (1985)



Annex 6

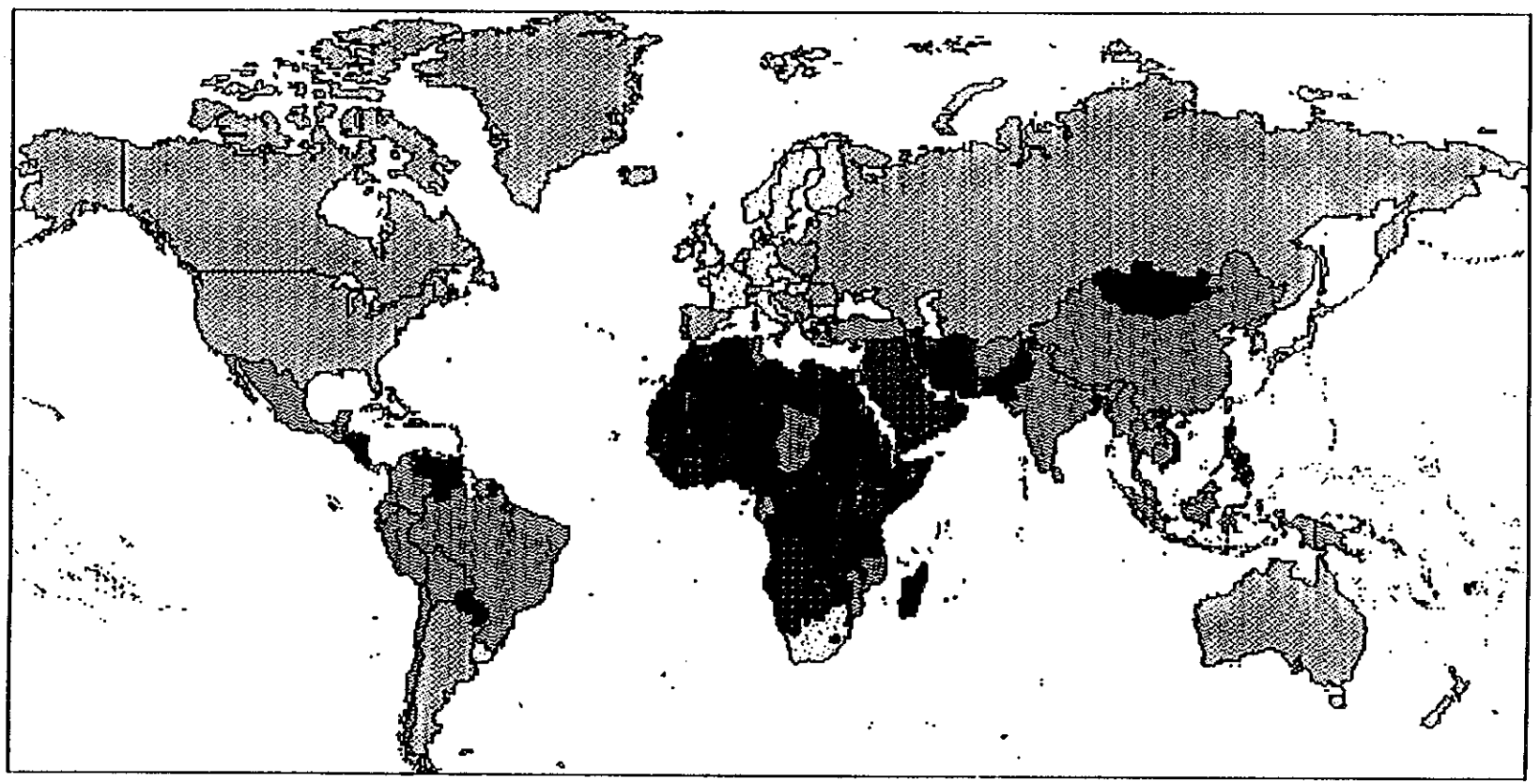
World Population Growth through History



Source: Population Reference Bureau.

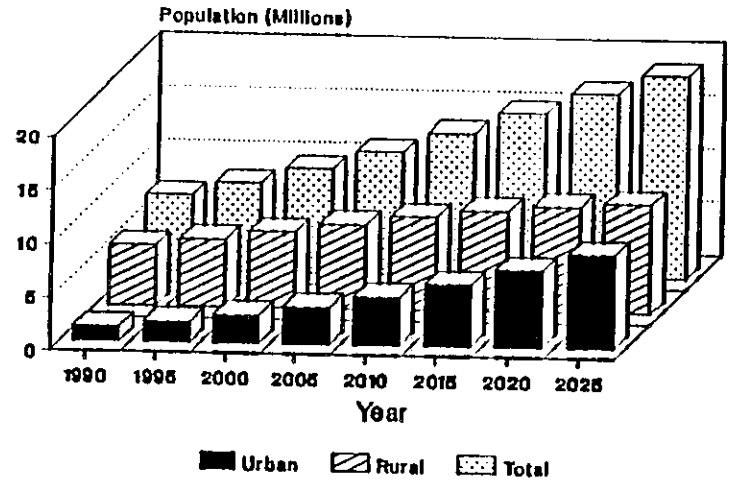
Annex 7

AVERAGE ANNUAL PUPULATION GROWTH RATE
(in percent)



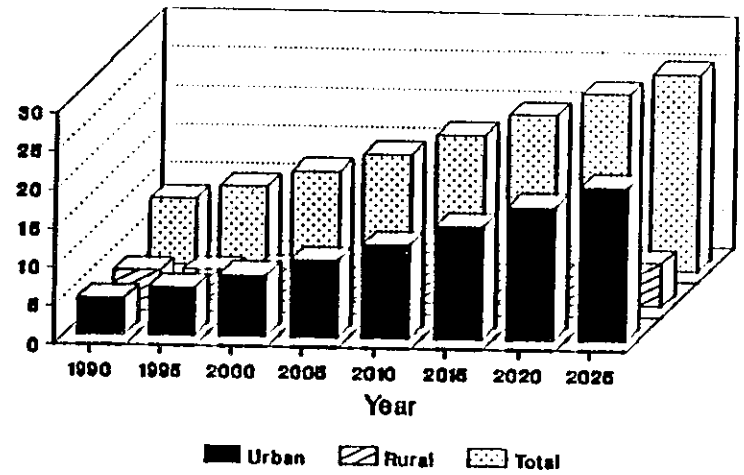
Annex 8

Population by Area, 1990-2025
Niger



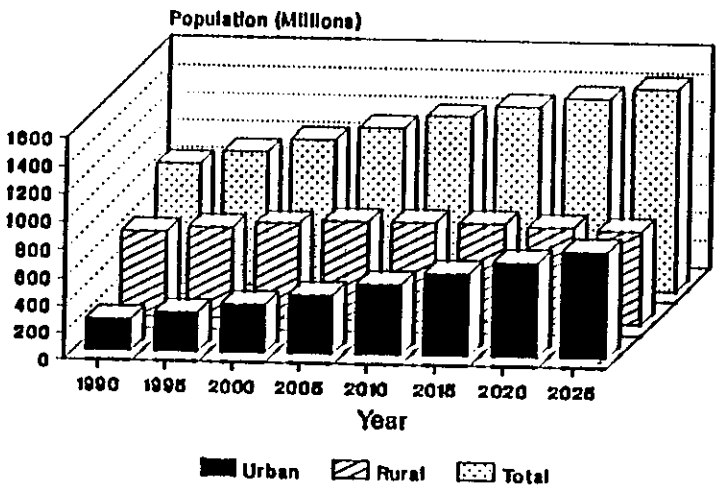
Source: United Nations (1989)

Population by Area, 1990-2025
Zambia



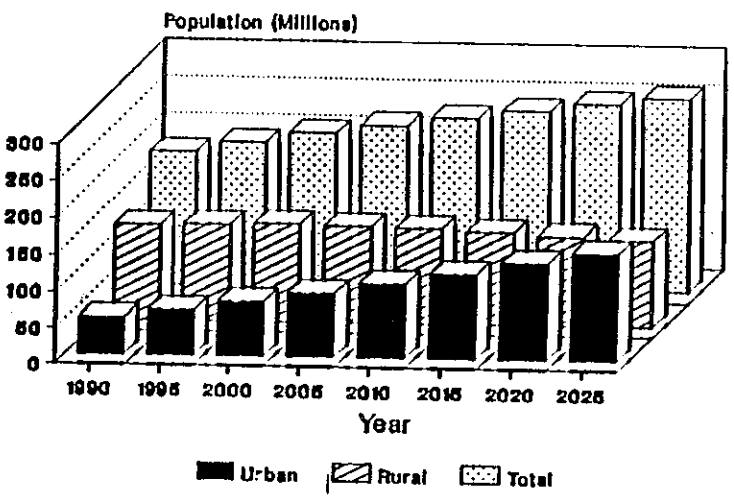
Source: United Nations (1989)

Population by Area, 1990-2025
India



Source: United Nations (1989)

Population by Area, 1990-2025
Indonesia



Source: United Nations (1989)

Annex 9

Future Scenario:

- More families
- Smaller families
- Older families
- Large proportion of urban families
- Families that are less directly dependent on natural resources for survival

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"Protecting the quality of life" means facing new global challenges.

Global challenges can only be faced successfully if micro-level processes are compatible with macro-level requirements.